

Signal by kirabook

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Summary:

Will meets a mysterious stranger when his radio malfunctions.
Fall 1981

1. Will Byers

Author's Note:

This is based off of a headcanon I had about how El and Will knew each other. In season 1, El recognized Will in a photograph for explained reasons. I theorized that they had been in contact via radio waves or something prior to the events of the series. Of course, thanks to the official comic releasing in September, we learned that Will and El actually met the night she ran away from Benny's. Can't wait to see that in full! But for now, please accept this!

I haven't decided if this is 'canon' to my fanfic series [Eye to Eye](#)

If you're interested in more Will & El content, check out my tumblr blog > > [here](#) < <

“That buzzing is back.” Will tinkered with his radio in Mike’s basement. An obnoxious buzzing plagued him for weeks. It started when the radio fell from his bag while riding home on his bike. The radio looked and sounded fine besides the buzz. “What if I really broke it? Oh man...”

“Let me see.” Lucas reached across the table. As soon as the radio left Will’s hands, the buzzing ceased. Lucas brought the radio to his ear. After a moment of silence, Lucas placed the radio on the table and shrugged. “I don’t hear it.”

“Just listen.” Will held the radio, and the buzzing returned full force, but Lucas seemed oblivious. He dialed up the volume. “It’s there.”

“Are you positive you don’t have an ear infection?”

Will sighed and fiddled with the controls, “You and Mike are just messing with me...”

“We’re not.” Lucas took the radio again, pressing his ear against the speaker. “You’re sure it’s not just the normal static? That’s all I hear.”

“It’s not that. It’s... it’s a different buzz. Like a hum.”

“Huh...”

The basement door slammed open, causing them to jump in their seats. Mike descended the stairs with a disappointed huff. “We can’t hang out today guys. I have to clean my room and other stupid stuff.”

“Why don’t you keep your room clean for once?” Lucas grabbed his bag and Will repacked his, neither of them settled in to stay yet.

“My room IS clean. It’s just untidy,” Mike grunted.

“Untidy is a synonym for dirty.” Lucas rolled his eyes and Will shrugged. As they left, Mike ranted about his room and chores. They ignored him and agreed to hang out tomorrow to make up for lost time.

Will and Lucas took their time riding down the street. Lucas cracked jokes at Mike’s expense and Will chuckled. The day Mike stopped complaining would be the day pigs flew.

“Next time when Dustin is around, we should start a d&d campaign for real.” Lucas and Will cruised side by side until they reached Lucas’ house and came to a stop.

“Hm?”

“Isn’t it time we stop talking and just do it?”

“Well... everyone hasn’t decided on what their character will be.” Will’s attention wandered to Dustin’s house down the street. Dustin didn’t feel well that day and went straight home after school. They planned to set up their own campaign last year when Dustin became their friend, but hesitated until they learned about the lore and how to play. Dustin knew the most, but refused to be Dungeon Master. Mike picked up the responsibility, but took his sweet time planning everything.

“Your character is a wizard, right?”

“Yeah...”

“Mine is a knight, Dustin’s a dwarf, and Mike can’t play because he’s the master.”

“I thought we were trying to figure out his role and how he could play with us?”

“Yes, but that’s why we’ve been stalling. Besides, we can figure that out after we’ve started. Might be easier that way. I’ll convince him tonight.”

“Right...” Lucas and Mike lived close. They talked with the radios any time they wanted. Will’s house was too far away making the signal too weak or unstable. It made him... jealous? Lucas raised his hand for a high five, stirring Will out of his thoughts. He and Lucas said they’d create a secret handshake, but for now, high fives did the trick. Will grinned and returned the gesture.

“See you tomorrow?”

“Yeah.” Someday, he’d buy a stronger bigger radio, an easy fix. Nothing something worth his jealousy.

Will got home before his mother and Jonathan, not unusual on a weekday. Joyce worked late, leaving Jonathan to watch him and the house. But, Jonathan had a job too, a secret one.

Will and Jonathan made a deal. Jonathan worked his secret job stocking shelves at the convenience store in town for a few hours and Will helped keep the secret. He needed the job to support their mom and buy his own car. Then, Jonathan could snag a real job. If Joyce discovered his plan though, she’d flip. While his brother worked at the store, Will got a ‘job’ too. Cover for Jonathan.

He grabbed Jonathan’s bag from the couch and arranged his trapper keeper on the kitchen table. Next, he grabbed a pop from the fridge, took a few swigs, and placed it by Jonathan’s work. If Joyce came home before Jonathan, Will would say Jonathan got ‘inspiration’ and took a quick break from homework to take pictures down the street. That excuse worked for them so far, but Will wondered how long before she uncovered the truth. ‘Inspiration’ only worked so many

times, he needed a new lie soon.

Satisfied with his work, Will dropped off his bag, took his supercom, grabbed some snacks and made his way to the forest behind their house. A few weeks ago, Jonathan helped him add a flag to Castle Byers. One of many small renovations he wished to make to the fort since the initial construction. The outside still needed work, but inside he had a blanket, paper, crayons, books and toys. A home away from home.

Will laid on his blanket with radio in hand. When he turned the power dial, the buzzing returned as expected. Strangely enough, the buzz increased in strength when he came to the fort. His ears didn't deceive him. Will turned the dials, trying to find an undisrupted channel. The buzzing inferred with every channel and made transmissions that much harder to understand.

At first, the radio worked fine. As time passed, the buzz grew louder and more incessant. He wanted to take in the radio for repairs, but that required money and Joyce. He didn't want to confess he dropped the expensive equipment carelessly, so he dealt with the buzzing.

Other than his equipment possibly being damaged, Will theorized the buzz came from a distant radio signal creating interference. Or, something nearby caused the disruption thanks to bad wiring. Those theories didn't explain why buzzing stopped when he didn't have the radio or why everyone else didn't hear it. Did he rub his socks on the carpet one too many times and created a static force field that messed with radio signals? He didn't think it worked that way, but he didn't rule it out either. There were many rumors of gas stations blowing up because of static. Good thing he wasn't old enough to pump gas.

As Will switched channels at his leisure, he paused on an empty channel and the buzzing died. Silence. Will frowned and held the radio closer to his ear. Complete silence. Confused, Will turned to another channel, and the buzzing came back. When he dialed back to the empty channel, dead silence returned. This never happened, not since the buzz first appeared.

A radio defect? *'Super unlikely,'* he thought. Why only one clear channel? Maybe a rogue radio wave interfered with all channels

except this one? That made little sense to him, why jam every signal except one?

While distracted by his thoughts, something brushed against his arm. Startled, Will shuffled to his feet, dropping the radio and colliding with the wall of the fort. The whole structure shook, but showed no sign of collapsing. Thankfully, Jonathan knew how to nail wood together even in the rain unlike him.

He searched the area for a bug or animal but found nothing. Nothing crawled on the walls inside trying to find an escape. Nothing outside rustled or made a sound.

Will looked at his arm, double checking for marks or residue. His arm didn't hurt, but he rubbed it to relieve the raised hairs and goosebumps on his skin. No matter how much he rubbed, the goosebumps persisted. An indescribable feeling washed over him, a conflict between something touched him and the fact that nothing was there to touch him.

Will studied the radio he abandoned on the blanket. The dial remained on the silent channel and the radio fell. Eerie silence fell upon the fort, not even the sounds of nature outside penetrated the thin layer of sticks and logs.

'Someone else is on the channel,' he thought, but rebuked it almost immediately. The channel had nothing but dead air, of course no one was on the line. The longer he stared at the silent radio, the more perplexed he felt. Someone lingered in the empty channel. It made no sense, he couldn't know someone was there.

'Someone is there,' his mind persisted.

Will gulped and took a deep breath. He picked up and pressed the radio against his ear, listening to the silence in anticipation. Nothing happened... except soft breathing and someone shuffling. No, not shuffling, it sounded like... water? His breath hitched, someone really was there.

"... Hello?" He whispered. Will held his breath, waiting for a reply. A long silence passed with no answer. He realized he hadn't pressed the

button to speak. Will sighed, disappointed yet relieved. Relieved, like after successfully or coincidentally avoiding conversing with a stranger-

“... Hello?” a small voice echoed. Will gasped and juggled the radio when it nearly slipped. The person sounded young, or a girl? How long had they been there?

“Who are you?” He inquired. He waited, but an answer never came. The buzz returned.

Will tried to reach the mysterious person many times after the first incident. He followed the same routine he followed that day. Went home, hid Jonathan's secret job, then journeyed to his fort with his radio. On an average day, he used the same channel as his friends in case their signals reached him. Other days, he spent time trying to find the signal that belonged to the stranger.

Today, Will struggled to focus on the comic he promised to return to Dustin tomorrow, but his attention roamed the fort instead. A cool breeze poured through the cracks of the fort keeping the temperature comfortable and the air fresh. No problems on that front. He even risked another scolding for bringing another pillow to the fort. No issues with comfort either. Normally he'd have finished the comic and moved to draw or write.

Instead, his eyes fixated on the radio. Per usual, the radio buzzed with static as it sat alone on a shelf. Occasionally, one of his friends muffled something, and another muffled in response. As interesting as the broken sentences of his friends could be, he cared more about finding and listening to a different signal. He tried to ignore it, but an urge to search other channels drained his patience to finish the comic or revel in his other hobbies.

Unable to resist, Will set the comic aside and replaced it with the weight of his radio. He twisted the knob as the radio buzzed to life even more than before.

Turn.

Static.

Will shook his head and placed the radio back on the shelf. He didn't want to waste time on the radio again today. He wasted many hours cruising channels in search of the right one. Will reached out to the comic, but he stopped midway. He knew he wouldn't finish the comic today no matter how hard he tried to focus. He needed to check the radio channels. Unable to resist, Will turned and reclaimed the radio.

Turn.

Buzz.

He didn't know what he expected but he couldn't let it go. Did he imagine it or not? He tried to rationalize it away, but daydreams are never that real. Will glanced at his arm, recalling the goosebumps that followed something brushing against him. He pondered if it were an evil spirit or something else just as terrible, but... evil didn't seem right. It wasn't scary or terrifying... just strange. And spooky, but not evil.

Will turned the dial one last time... Silence. Unnatural silence. Someone was on the channel. Will sat straight and held the radio in both hands, afraid he'd drop it. Will pushed to talk right away, afraid they'd leave.

"Hello?"

"Hello." They replied immediately with a confidence. This surprised him, had they waited and searched for his signal too? Many questions raced through his mind.

'Who are you?'

'What's your name?'

'How old are you?'

'Why is your signal so weird?'

Before he asked, they dropped out leaving him alone again.

They never had a proper conversation, but that made the encounters more mysterious and interesting. Will stopped trying to think of something to say and settled for greetings. Every interaction involved a *'Hello'* and sometimes a *'Goodbye'*. Sometimes, Will threw in *'Have a good day'*, but they never returned the gesture.

The buzzing faded over time until he didn't hear it anymore. He didn't need the buzz or silence to find a 'good' channel, he knew which channel to use by instinct. Besides which, the person never appeared on the same channel twice.

Will tried to show his friends, but it never worked. The mysterious stranger came only in the solitude of his fort. He wondered if it were a coincidence. Kids at school overheard him talking about it once and gave him strange looks. Even his friends looked uncomfortable from the unwanted attention. After that, he kept the situation to himself.

The imaginary friend who only said *'Hello'* and *'Goodbye'* would be his secret.

2. Interlude

Summary for the Chapter:

Interlude, cut content

Notes for the Chapter:

I've decided to cut off a big portion of "Signal". Instead of 4 chapters, it'll be 2. I've finished and edited Will's part already obviously, and the next chapter will be from El's perspective. I'm doing this because a canon version of what happened to Will in the Upside Down is gonna be here in a few months, y'know? The original intention of the fic was to detail a past even that probably can't be overwritten or completely debunked.

Still, I did like some of what I wrote, so enjoy this unedited drabble. Please excuse massive typos or sentences that probably don't make sense~ This would have probably been chapter 3? I was alternating between Will's perspective and El's. I wrote this before more previews of the upcoming comic starting pouring out.

When he saw her in the woods, he didn't know what to think. In the darkness of this place, she glowed faintly. Wisps of light trailed behind her as she made her way through the trees. If he had to describe a ghost, this was it.

He'd never seen them before, and yet they felt so familiar. He resisted the temptation to rush over, hoping they could see him, figure out if they were real or like all the other ghosts he'd seen. Why? He'd never met them before. He hid behind the tree with his gun, eyeing the forest for the creature that hunted him.

When his eyes returned to the ghostly figure, their eyes met. Their eyes were wide and fearful. Will pulled further behind the tree and searched around him in panic. From what he could tell, the monster

wasn't there. No one was there. No one except him and the ghost. When he peered around the tree, they were still there, looking right at him.

Could they see him? Did someone finally see him? If they were a ghost, did that mean he was a ghost too?

The figure approached him, their eyes darted in every which direction, but they always found their way back on him. They looked astonished and surprised to see him there. They finally stopped a few feet away. From this distance, Will saw that the ghostly figure was a girl. She was young, like him and rather skinny.

The silence stretched on as they stared at each other, Will didn't know what to say.

'Can you see me?'

That much was obvious.

'Who are you?'

He could ask that, but did it really matter??

'Where is this place?'

Now that was a great question. Will opened his mouth to speak, but she beat him to the punch.

"Hello...?"

Her voice. It was her. She was the person on the other end of the signal. This was the person he'd been saying hello and goodbye to. Why was she here? How was she here? Was she always so close? Will didn't move when she timidly reached forward to touch him. Her finger poked his cheek. She was warm. She was real. She looked no different from the other ghosts, and yet she touched him. More questions piled up.

"Who are you?" He asked. His voice carried a strange echo through the corrupted forest around them. She didn't look surprised, she must have recognized him before he even spoke a word.

A loud inhuman screech sent a chill down his spine. They both looked into the the trees, searching for the creature that could only be described as a demon. The sound of crunching leaves and growling replaced the chill with pure adrenaline.

They ran in the same direction, the opposite direction of the sounds. Will knew running wouldn't be enough, the monster was fast and tricky. Running wouldn't work. It would catch up and get them.

He stopped.

He turned.

He aimed the gun as best as he could.

He only had one shot left. It wouldn't kill the monster, but it would slow it down for a few minutes. A few minutes for her to get away and for him get to a head start.

When he first arrived in this hellish place, sleeping was impossible. The cold, wet and dark landscape drained his energy, but the fear of the monster finding kept his eyes open and his body alert.

The fear still permeate every fiber of his being, but his body refused to move anymore. He hid in his fort, Castle Byers. For whatever reason, the monster, the Demogorgon, never didn't follow him there. Maybe it kept searching his house, hoping to find him and... eat him? Kill him?

His whole body ached. His cracked lips stung from the cold. He ran out of water and food a few days ago. He carried his bag as long as he could, but it became too heavy to carry and run. Nothing was useful inside anymore.

Was he going to die? Is this what death felt like? So... lonely.

As his mind fought between staying awake and sleeping, a soft voice stirred him.

"Will?"

Ah. It was her. He shivered when something warm enveloped his hand. He fought against his heavy eyelids, finding her hands tightly around his. Her hands felt like a furnace and he realized how numb he was.

“Your mom... she’s coming for you.”

She is? She really is? The last time they spoke, she told him to run and hide. So he did. He didn’t know how long it’d been since. He didn’t know the time of day or how long he’d been trapped there.

He wanted to go home. He wanted to see his mom again. And Jonathan. And his friends. Despite himself, Will forced his chaps lips apart to speak.

“Hurry.” He managed to say. The ghost would tell them, right? “Hurry...” He said one last time.

“Just- hold on on a little longer,” she answered. Her voice became distorted as it echoed around him. “Will?” She called, but he could barely hear her. His eyelids fell and his thoughts became hazy.

“Will?!”

‘Sorry,’ he wanted to say. She sounded terrified, but he was unable to comfort her. She was gone, and so was he.

3. Eleven

Summary for the Chapter:

Eleven meets a stranger in a castle unlike she's ever seen

She didn't know what to make of the persistent buzz. She thought the bright light in her room gave off the sound, but the buzz remained even with the light off. Maybe it was the blinking box in the corner of her room, but when she tried to listen to it, all she heard was a strange whirring sound, the sound wasn't the same.

She heard the faint buzz in the complete silence of her room. For hours she'd lay there, trying to hone in on it and figure out what it was, but the buzz remained the same.

One day, something changed.

'I need you to find him,' Papa ordered with his soft voice. His command wasn't a question, if she didn't listen, they'd lock her away in the cold dark room. Or they'd try. She obeyed to avoid the risk. Appearance fresh in her mind, she found it easy to focus on the man's voice. Papa demanding her to repeat the man's words, but didn't need to. Instead, she let him listen himself. No one taught her to do this, it happened without her input.

When Papa stopped her, she held her knees and used them to rest her head, exhausted from the effort. Her nose bleed and her focus blurred. She didn't want to do this, it hurt. It hurt so much.

Later that day, the buzzing became so much clearer.

With every request from Papa came, pain followed, but she did as Papa asked to avoid punishment. With every request she fulfilled, the source of the buzzing grew closer and closer and her focus strengthen.

"This is our friend. She is farther this time, but I'd like you to find

her.” Papa explained. Eleven scanned the picture on the table before her. The woman looked familiar, another one of Papa’s friends she saw now and then.

“... How far?” she asked.

“Not too far. Last time it was difficult for you... This time, I want you to find her and tell me what she’s holding.”

As he spoke, Eleven took a deep breath and leaned forward, memorizing the woman in the photograph. Eleven closed her eyes and focused. Finding people on the ‘outside’ proved more difficult than finding someone in another room. The further they went, the more difficult tuning out other voices became. Little by little, the other voices faded away as she focused on one specific one. As she focused, the buzzing she tried to ignore distracted her.

‘Find the friend,’ Eleven repeated like a mantra. At last, the buzz quieted with only complete silence left. When she opened her eyes, she expected to see the woman in the photograph surrounded by inky darkness.

A strange structure stood before her, something unliked she’d ever seen. What she recognized as the American flag twisted and turned as if an invisible force tugged it. Eleven took a hesitant step forward, curiosity beating out her anxiety. With every step, she noted new things about the structure.

She paused when she noticed a sign and took her time trying to read it.

‘Castle.’

She recognized that word. A book Papa used to read her told a story of a princess in a castle, but she couldn’t remember the details. The castle in the book looked completely different. She read the sign again, but she didn’t recognize the second word.

‘... Byers?’ She slowly sounded the word in out her head, but it still made no sense.

Above that sign was another sign that read, *‘Home of Will the Wise’* .

Nonsensical.

Eleven circled the castle, giving up trying to understand the signs in favor of finding more things. The rest of the castle wasn't as interesting as the side with the signs until she noticed them.

From the cracks in the castle walls, she saw someone inside tinkering with something. The object gave off a faint hum, almost like a buzz. A buzz that distracted her earlier, and the day before, and the day before that. Eleven circled back around and realized the striped cloth acted as an entrance to the castle. The cloth moved like the flag. Thinking about it now, it reminded her of when Papa brought her a 'fan' once because her room became very warm.

Unsure of how to proceed, Eleven sank to the floor, looking inside the castle when the cloth allowed her to see. The stranger inside resembled her. They were small, unlike Papa and friends. Eleven pushed the cloth aside and crawled into the small space unnoticed. No one ever noticed her like this.

Eleven came close and watched them intently. The small person turned the knobs a few times, occasionally bringing it to their ear to listen. Did they hear the buzzing too? They turned the knob again seemingly unsatisfied with what they heard, but the buzzing stopped. They brought the radio up to their ear again. Did they hear the radio go silent too?

As they messed with the knobs and dials, her curiosity toward the object grew. She reached forward, intending to determine if it were an object she can touch. Unexpectedly, her prodding finger collided with their arm instead.

Their reaction startled her. When they shuffled back against the castle wall, she did too. Their wide eyes searched the cabin, searching for her. She expected them to stop and notice her crouched in the corner, but their eyes skipped her multiple times. Eleven looked around the castle, searching for another explanation to their startled reaction, but there wasn't one.

She never touched someone, and she remembered the first few times she tried. Her hands went right through their bodies and swirled

around her like dust. At first, it startled her. Scared her. But she grew used to it. She never tried touching anyone unless Papa asked her to.

She watches as they rubbed their arm in the same place she poked. They felt her touch, it wasn't a fluke. How was she meant to react to this, to someone who didn't disappear?

When they returned to the blanket, Eleven watched intensely. They picked up the radio and stared before bringing it to their ear again.

"... Hello?" They said timidly. Eleven gaped and leaned closer. She listened to people in this emptiness as Papa wanted. In this place, everyone's voice sounded strange and sometimes hard to understand. Papa told her the strange voices were 'echoes'. He told her when she grew stronger, people would be easier to understand. That time had yet to come.

Why did their voice sound so clear? The stranger's voice sounded like hers, nothing like Papa and friends. It sounded clear and close, close enough to reach over and touch them. She COULD touch them, but didn't want risk it. What if they disappeared this time? She didn't want this moment to pass.

"... Hello?" she responded. She wondered if they would hear, but their audible gasp answered her question.

A new realization came to her. The buzzing didn't come from the weird object they held, but...

"Who are you?" Their clear voice rang clear again, interrupting her thoughts.

"Eleven?" An old familiar voice cut through their conversation. Papa. She forgot to do what he asked of her. Her eyes snapped open, disconnecting from the castle and the stranger. As expected, exhaustion washed over. She brought her knees to her chest and propped up her head to recover.

"Who was that, Eleven?" Papa sat next to her, writing notes as he always did. The paper had more written on it.

“... Who?”

“The person you were speaking to. It didn’t sound like our friend.” Papa tapped the picture of the woman still laying on the desk. “Did you find someone else?”

Eleven didn’t answer. She found someone else and there was no reason to hide it... but why did she feel so hesitant? Papa waited for an answer, but she didn’t provide one.

“They sounded young. Small. Were they a child, like you?” He continued with a soft voice.

Yes, they were small. Just like her, but she didn’t answer aloud.

“... Were they a boy, or a girl?”

She hadn’t thought about it until now and she didn’t ask. The person she met might have been a boy, but she couldn’t be sure.

“Eleven.” Eleven met Papa’s eyes. He looked impatient. If she didn’t answer him, his impatience would become anger. “Please answer my questions. They are very important.”

For the first time, she wondered why. Why did she hurt people? Why did she need to locate his friends? Why did he need to know about the s stranger he met?

“Eleven.” His finger tapped on the table. “Answer my questions,” he demanded, all kindness from his voice gone.

“I don’t know,” she whispered. She didn’t know if he were a boy or a girl. She didn’t know his name. He said ‘Hello’, but why did Papa wish to know? “I’m sorry.” Eleven sat forward again and tried to concentrate on the image. If she found Papa’s friend instead, maybe he’d be happy. Before she closed her eyes, Papa laid his large hand over the photo, blocking the woman’s face and most of the picture.

“It’s all right.” He answered, his voice soft again. “We can always find our friend later. I want to know about the other friend you met today. The one on the speaker moments ago.”

Friend? The person she met wasn't a friend. He was small with a voice like hers unlike friends.

"Why?" She asked. Papa looked taken aback, but smiled at her.

"Why? Because... you stumbled across a different kind of friend." Papa reached and laid his hand upon her head. His hand was warm on her scalp, she welcomed it. "I'd like to meet them in person. Don't you?"

"No." This wasn't the first time she said no, and it wouldn't be the last. She didn't want to meet him in person. That means he would come to this place. That's bad. Bad. Papa might hurt him. SHE might hurt him.

"Excuse me?" Papa said. He wanted a different answer, but on this, she would not budge.

"No." She repeated, less firmly this time. He would lock her away in darkness for a long long time... but not anymore. If he did, she-

Papa gathered his things and got up from his seat. He didn't look at her or say anything as he left. When the door shut, it locked behind him.

No, he couldn't lock her away in the room anymore, but there was nothing she could do about the crippling loneliness whenever she disobeyed.

Papa never asked about the boy. She only visited him alone in her room. As time passed, the buzzing decreased and eventually disappeared, but she remembered where to find him.

Castle Byers

When she visited, she learned a little more about the outside and compared it to the books she used to read a long time ago.

Sticks and logs made up most of the castle walls. That's why it had holes.

The crunchy stuff on the floor were leaves. That meant the castle had a lot of trees around it.

The wind blew the flag, the door cloth, and sometimes the things inside the castle through the holes.

She learned a lot about the castle, but little about him.

He noticed when she arrived, but she gave up questioning how. In the past, he asked her questions she didn't know how to answer, so she chose not to. Now, he never said anything except a greeting. She remembered every single one.

She entered his castle as she always did. He'd pick up the device he called a radio and greeted her.

"Hi," he announced.

"Hello," she answered.

"Goodbye," he whispered, thinking she would soon leave.

"Bye," she returned. She never left right away. She stayed as long as she could for many reasons. For example, to poke him.

She poked his hair, his arms, his legs and his back. Once, she even poked his cheek and his nose. He never disappeared much to her amazement. He used to startle or jump and yell. Once, he left the castle and fled somewhere else. These days, he looked around the cabin lazily or ignored her prodding. He couldn't see her, but he always heard her. She made as little sound as possible and stayed silent after their goodbye.

During times like these, she had time to look around his cabin. In one corner, he had many soft animals in a pile. She remembered having similar things. 'Toys' she recalled. She asked Papa for a toy, and he gave her one.

'It's a lion,' he explained. The boy had a lion too, almost like hers. She wondered if Papa bought it from the same place.

Occasionally the boy used paper and pens to write on paper, but

nothing he wrote resembled Papa's writing. He drew people, animals and other weird things she didn't recognize. She never knew paper and pens did so many things. She asked Papa for paper and pens, she wanted to try it too,

Instead, he gave her '*crayons*', they same stuff the boy used. She drew herself, Papa, and her lion on her bed. Her drawing didn't compare to his, but she loved it. Papa allowed her to put it on her wall, but took crayons and paper away after. She never got to play with them again.

Her free time decreased. She used to spend hours and hours alone in her room, hours she spent trying to focus and spend time in the castle. Now, Papa rarely left her side. He entered her room without knocking. When bedtime came, he took to her room and stayed until she fell asleep.

Papa didn't ask about the boy anymore, but he pushed her to find more people further and further away leaving her drained and weak. With so little energy, she couldn't visit the castle as much.

When she reached her limit, Papa did not stop. He pushed her further with new methods.

'Think of it like a bathtub.' Papa told her once. The bathtub did not resemble a real bathtub. In the bathtub surrounded by water and darkness, she traveled farther than ever. With new power came new problems.

If she entered the void from the bathtub without focus, she found herself at the castle by default. It terrified her. When in the bathtub, Papa and friends heard everything she picked up. If Papa heard the boy again, he'd ask more questions. He'd want her to find him and his location. He'd want to learn his name or to hurt him. It'd be terrible.

Bad.

She hated the bath and how open it made her, but the threat of discovery awakened strong feelings deep inside. No matter how hard she needed to practice and concentrate, she could not return to the

castle when Papa was around. No matter what happened, she made sure only she received the boy's voice and visited castle.

She later learns her feelings was the desire to protect. Even later, she'd learn how powerful those feelings made her.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading! This was just some ideas of how the two could have technically crossed paths before the start of the series. As you can see, it's more that El would know Will more than Will would know her. He probably thinks all of this stuff is part imagination, part someone with a really bad signal communicates with him sometimes and it's kind of cool. El on the other hand doesn't know a ton about Will, maybe not even his name since they don't have an actual conversation, but she learns a lot because of him and his castle. Here are a few extra notes in case they were hard to understand:

- The buzzing Eleven and Will hear are from each other. This is under the assumption psychics are naturally attracted to each other. Brenner wanted Eleven to tell him more about the 'friend' she met because he already knows this. Institutionally, Eleven doesn't want to tell him anything. Brenner probably tries to track down the one Eleven came in contact with with no luck, but he might not be that concerned about it anyway. He has Eleven already.
- At this point, she's already killed two guards trying to lock her away in the small space, maybe more. Brenner cannot physically punish Eleven anymore. Her punishment is being locked in her room with no contact. It still hurts her, but not as much as claustrophobic darkness.
- Why does Eleven seem to have a basic understanding of the outside world when she

first escapes? It's because she visited Castle Byers occasionally and soaked up context clues like a sponge. Obviously, it's still not enough to just look at stuff, but it's enough to where she isn't totally freaked out by the outside world after supposedly living her entire life in the lab

- Eleven is later confused by the word 'friends' when the boys use it. She always thought friends = Brenner and other scientist. That is the only context Brenner used the word friend in, so she did not consider Will to be anything like a 'friend'.
- El wants a toy like Will's and Brenner gets her one (she adores it). El wants to try drawing because she saw Will doing it. Brenner allowed her to do so, but seeing as she can only draw stick figures, he probably didn't find her doodles a useful tool for what he wanted to do, so took the activity away.
- Eleven can read some of the signs on Will's castle, but she probably doesn't understand last names, so doesn't know what 'Byers' means. She also probably doesn't know that Will can be a name, so the statement "Home of Will the Wise" if will isn't a name is a bit odd to comprehend for someone like her.
- If you remember, El seemed to know about Castle Byers in season 1 episode 7 when she found Will. I'm sure she could read, but she just read it so casually and entered inside without hesitation. So, I figured it'd be cool if she's been there plenty of times before technically.